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From: jennywalker76@yahoo.com

To: ldemont@mt.gov; COONEYEMAIL@AOL.COM

Sent: Mon, 5 Feb 2007 7:34 AM

Subject: Re: Safety belt hearing

Hi Mike & Lorelle,

I'm sorry to say that I will be unable to attend the hearing. However, I am sending you the long version of my story along with some photos. I can't believe that it's almost been a year since my accident. When I went to Helena in May to make a speech for the MDT, I dealt with Banik Communications. They might have a copy of the speech that I made which is the short version of my story. You can reach them at banik@banik.com. I truly wish that I could come to the hearing and share my story. If there is anything I can do or if you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank You,

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It was February 7th of 2006, around 11:30pm that my view on life, love, family, and faith was changed forever.

That night I'd been angry at the whole world; my family, my friends, and my life. It was total nonsense that I felt that way. I had a great family, great friends, and a pretty great life. I was simply in a bad mood. So I decided to take a drive to "cool" off. I'll admit that speed was definitely a factor. On the way back home I missed a corner, over-corrected, and was headed straight for a pretty deep ditch on the other side of the highway. As the car headed into the ditch the front end sunk into the ground with a great deal of force. At which point the rear of my car came flying upward which caused my car to roll end over end. I remember thinking "Dear God Please Help Me".

There are two amazing parts to this story. Number one, is that I remember most of the accident. Secondly, I was not wearing my seat belt. And I'll tell everyone right now that I was extremely lucky.

Honestly I had always worn my seat belt. But I'd only gone 3 miles before I decided to turn back and head home. I was only a quarter of a mile from my house, where I was living with my parents, that the accident happened. Essentially that was one of the things that bothered my parents so much. They knew they had been so very close yet couldn't help their daughter because they didn't even know I was out there.

No one will ever know exactly what happened. What we do know is that I was ejected right away. Most people speculate that I was thrown out the back window. This is mostly due to the fact that the front windshield although shattered was in place. It is believed that when the cars back end first started coming around I was pulled out the back window because of the tremendous gravitational force. However some speculate that I may have went out a side window or even a door that may have come open. Honestly, it doesn't really matter how I was ejected. I'm just happy to be here to tell you my story.

I remember that I had went for a cd or reached for something. When I looked up my car had gone over to the right and I caught some of the gravel just off the pavement. I jerked the wheel to hard and I remember saying out loud "OH NO" when the car first went into the ditch. From there all I remember are the horrible sounds of metal and plastic crashing. While I was ejected I must have been knocked unconscious. When I came to I could see my car was at least 75 feet from me. I was pretty disoriented but I could see the car. It was upright and the dome light was on and I heard the radio.

I immediately tried to stand up and a pain I had never even thought possible shot through my entire body. I knew something was broken but

was unsure of what exactly it was. I knew that I had to get to the car. If I could get to the car, I could honk the horn and get someone's attention. I started to drag myself to the car. I was in a pasture that had a lot of cactus. With each reach I was unsure where my hand would land. It was an extremely dark night with no moonlight. My body started getting cold fast. It was 19 degrees that night. That is 13 degrees below freezing. You honestly don't know just how cold 19 degrees is until you stay out in for an extended period of time. As I started to drag myself towards my car I realized that my shoes were missing because my feet were the first thing to get cold. I'm not sure how long it took me to get to the car but I figured it was at least an hour if not two. By the time I got to the car my hands were full of cactus, but that didn't even compare to how bad my lower body hurt.

I knew that I was pretty close to town and even closer to our neighbors house. Ed and Mary Lawrence said they heard the crash and Ed even got out of bed to check on his horses. But because of the dark night he didn't see my car.

Once I got to the car, as I lay on the ground, I tried to prop myself up into the sitting position. But the pain was just too much for me to handle in the sitting position. So I laid on my back and tried desperately to open the drivers door. The door would not budge. The drivers door window had shattered so with all of my might I pulled myself up to look in the car. Unfortunately, the air bags had deployed and of course I could no longer honk the horn. I knew that all I could do was lay there and wait.

I glanced around but couldn't see anything that I could cover up with. Besides it was just too painful to move. I knew that I had to try to stay warm. So I laid on my stomach as close to the car as I could get. I was lucky enough to have a coat with a hood on it. I put the hood up and covered my face with my arms.

Throughout the night I heard probably eight to ten trucks or cars go by. But because of the curve and the dark night there was no way they could see me. I realized this after about three or four times of trying to wave them down. I knew that I could try and crawl back to the highway to get help. However it was late at night and that highway isn't traveled much at night. I knew that there might not be anyone come by for hours. I was better off to stay by the car at least to try and keep some of the cold wind off of me.

Once I got to the car I never lost consisiouness. It was the longest night of my life. I tried to sleep but could not. I would glance at my watch at least every fifteen minutes. After a couple of hours I knew that I wouldn't be found until daylight.

I can honestly say that I have never prayed as much as I did that night.

I knew by then that it was my leg that was broken, but I had no idea what else I had injured. I figured that I could easily have internal injuries and that I could be dead before someone found me. You can't imagine the thoughts that go through a person's head when they are in that position. I thought of the fact that I wouldn't get a chance to say goodbye. I thought about how much I wanted everyone to know how much I loved them. I thought about how it would affect my parents to lose one of their children. I thought about my brother and my sister. I thought about how awful it would be for my whole family. I had started out the night angry at everyone, and in turn I was angry at myself for that. I thought about a new relationship I had started 8 months earlier. And how well it was progressing. I thought about the fact that after a divorce and another horrible relationship, I had finally found a man that was good to me and good for me. I thought about how awful it was going to be not to have a future with him. I thought about all the things I hadn't done yet. Like having a family, the one thing I have craved since I was a little girl. Or going back to school and getting a degree. There was so much to think about. I just wasn't ready to die. I prayed and begged God to let me live. I must have said the Lord's Prayer a thousand times that night. And for comfort I sang Amazing Grace over and over again.

I was so cold, so lonely, and so very scared. At one point in time I felt something touch my foot. I laid still and prayed that whatever was there would go away. We have had sightings of mountain lions in our area and I have to admit I was in fear of something eating me alive. I'm assuming that it was a raccoon or some other critter. Thankfully it left soon after it arrived.

The cold seemed to actually affect me more than the pain I felt. I have never been that cold. I prayed for the time to go faster. Finally I saw the first signs of daylight.

Around 6:30 that morning, 7 hours after the initial accident, I was graced with the presence of two beautiful dogs. I knew that they were Ed & Mary's dogs and that meant Ed & Mary were up. I started to scream for help and within a couple of minutes they were by my side. I had never been so happy to see another human. Ed ran to go get my mom and call an ambulance. Mary went to go get me blankets. It wasn't long before my mom was there. I'm thirty years old and I can tell you that I still wanted my mommy. It was such a relief and such a great feeling to have her there with me. But the look on her face and the tone of her voice was so sad. Mom and Mary continued to pile blankets on me but I was still so cold. I was also terribly thirsty. It wasn't until mom started to give me a drink of water that I realized my mouth was full of dirt. I tried desperately to rinse it out but I was so cold and in so much pain I could hardly get much of it out.

My mom stayed with me and just the sound of her voice soothed me. It was only a short time later that I started to feel myself drift off to sleep. My mom kept trying to keep me awake. It was about another 20 minutes when my dad arrived. When he showed up I just lost it and started crying hysterically. I kept saying to my parents that I was sorry. Which I was. They both stayed so calm, but I could hear the concern in their voices and that broke my heart.

I've never been very big on hospitals or doctors but I can tell you that I really wanted an ambulance to show up. No one would let me move which was the right thing to do. No one including myself was sure of the extent of my injuries. Internal injuries and a broken back were the main concerns.

Because of the extremely rural location of my home town an ambulance had to come out of another state about 37 miles. It took them about 45 minutes to get there.

I don't remember everything once the ambulance got there. However I do remember that when they rolled me over on the back board the pain was beyond intense. Once I was in the ambulance they started putting hot packs all over me and covered me with several blankets.

Brandy a member of the ambulance service was amazing. She talked to me the whole time and tried to reassure me that everything would be okay. About fifteen minutes after the ambulance showed up a paramedic showed up. They had warmed up IV fluid and he immediately started the IV. It wasn't but five minutes after he arrived that the Life Flight helicopter got there. I would be transported to a hospital 100 miles away.

When they tried to put a splint on my leg I screamed in agony. John, the paramedic, was outside preparing my parents for the worst. He had to tell them that there was a great chance I would lose my leg. I had shattered my right femur, my thigh bone. It is the biggest bone in your body. Later I would learn that I had also broken my pelvis in three spots close together. The reason that they thought I would lose my leg is because it was without circulation for so long and the cold had actually started destroying tissue.

After about 10 minutes in the helicopter I finally started to warm up. I had the onset of hypothermia and the medics were very concerned about that. There was a wonderful nurse on the helicopter that continued to talk to me and tell me that I would be okay. There was also another paramedic there, but I don't remember his face. He held my hand and rubbed the back of my hand. Such a simple gesture comforted me a great deal.

I don't remember getting to the hospital or much of the emergency room. I do remember my sister being the first to get there. It is a very painful feeling to see the concern in your loved ones faces and know that

you caused that concern and sadness.

I went into surgery a few hours after I got there. They had to run numerous tests. I had blood tests twice every hour. I had cat scans, an MRI, and a lot of x-rays. The doctors were still very concerned that I may lose my leg. My kidneys were also failing. Because of the extreme cold and the broken leg, my body was losing tissue. Therefore the kidneys were trying to get rid of this tissue and essentially were being over-worked. My liver was also causing some concern because of all of the medications I was taking. My entire back side was bruised from the impact.

I spent two agonizing weeks in the hospital. Of course they were able to save my leg. With three incisions they placed a titanium rod through my entire right thigh bone. There was also a rod that goes diagonal from the thigh bone to the pelvis. Not to mention the screw at the bottom that holds the rod in place.

Over the course of those two weeks I had to have extensive surgery on my leg, my kidneys had to be flushed, and a blood transfusion. I also acquired pneumonia which required respiratory therapy and anti-biotics. Those two weeks in the hospital were awful. Because of the pain I was unable to get much sleep. I had to have help every time I went to the bathroom. And every time I moved I hurt. Of course my family couldn't be there 24 hours a day. And honestly it was very lonely and I was very depressed. I was so happy every time my sister, mom, dad, or friends would stop by.

After two weeks I was released. I had to ride in a vehicle 100 miles. That was the absolute worst ride I've ever been on. No matter how I sat the pain was excruciating. However, it was such a comfort to be home.

Even after I was home it was so hard. I had been a relatively independent woman. And having to have your mom or sister help you to the bathroom was embarrassing. I couldn't walk without a walker. I couldn't sit down without help. I couldn't take a shower without help. I couldn't do anything on my own for six weeks. I would get frustrated because I couldn't do the simple things like wash my hair. I would take my frustrations out on my mom and sister which was in no way fair to them. The first couple of weeks all I could do was lay on my back in bed and watch TV. I would try to read or do something like that, but I just couldn't get comfortable enough. It was an extremely long six weeks.

Because of this accident I now have \$66,000 in medical bills. I had just gotten my credit cleaned up. I also had just paid my car off and it was now totaled.

I now walk with a limp and the doctor said that I will definitely have

arthritis and problems with my leg and pelvis the rest of my life. I have three scars down the side of my leg and of course will have those the rest of my life.

After going through something like this you appreciate life so much more. You don't take life, family, and friendship for granted.

The reason that I'm telling you this story is plain and simple. Had I been wearing my seat belt I wouldn't have gone through all of this. The highway patrol told my parents that had I been wearing my seat belt I would have walked away from that accident with just a few bumps and bruises. Believe me there is nothing fun about laying in a pasture for seven hours with the fear of dying. It's such a simple action to put that seat belt on.

People, myself included, tend to think they are invincible. We think "Oh that wouldn't happen to me". I thought that too. This sort of thing can happen to anyone. I am absolutely blessed and so very lucky to be here and to be able to tell you my story. Think about your family, your children, your parents, your spouse, everyone that cares about you. Think about them before you say "Oh that wouldn't happen to me". Buckle up because I can tell you from experience it will save your life.